

florists, nurseries, garden centers, or flowers found on the side of the road. Consume only flowers that you or someone else has grown specifically for that purpose. If you have hay fever, asthma or allergies, it best not to eat flowers since many allergies are due to sensitivity to pollen of specific plants. It's best to introduce flowers into your diet one at a time and in small quantities.

### **Growing Edible Flowers**

Growing edible flowers is essentially the same as growing flowers for ornamental purposes. Most flowers require a well-drained soil with a pH ranging from 5.5 to 6. Soil test. Use a 2- to 3-inch layer of mulch to reduce weeds, conserve soil moisture, maintain uniform soil temperature, and reduce the amount of soil splashed onto the plant during a heavy rain. Irrigate to keep plants actively growing and flowering; most plants will need 1 inch of water per week. If possible, avoid overhead irrigation because moisture on the leaf surface for extended periods of can increase the chances of disease development. Irrigating with a soaker hose works well.

Chemicals for pest control should be avoided, if possible. Hand-pick harmful insects. Beneficial insects, such as lady beetles and praying mantises, can be used to decrease insect populations. Growing different flowers together provides diversity to support a good beneficial insect population and keeps pest problems low. Many gardeners locate their edible flower garden away from other plants to avoid chemical spray drift. Many edible flowers can be successfully grown in containers.

### **Harvesting Flowers**

Flavor can vary with growing conditions and cultivars. Conduct a taste test before harvesting large amounts of a particular flower. Flowers should be picked in the cool of the day, after the dew has evaporated. For maximum flavor choose flowers at their peak. Avoid

flowers that are not fully open or that are past their prime. To maintain maximum freshness, keep flowers cool after harvest. Long-stem flowers should be placed in a container of water. Short-stemmed flowers, such as borage and orange blossoms, should be harvested within 3 to 4 hours of use, placed in a plastic bag, and stored in a refrigerator. Damp paper towels placed in the plastic bag will help maintain high humidity.

Because pollen can detract from the flavor, it's best to remove the pistils and stamens. Pollen may cause an allergic reaction for some people. Remove the sepals of all flowers except violas, Johnny-jump-ups, and pansies. For flowers such as calendula, chrysanthemum, lavender, rose, tulip, and yucca, only the flower petals are edible. The white base of the petal of many flowers may have a bitter taste and should be removed from flowers such as chrysanthemums, dianthus, marigolds, and roses.

### **For Further Reading**

- Belsinger, Susan. 1991. *Flowers in the Kitchen*. Interweave Press; Loveland, Colorado.
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